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Spy Ring Damage Unrivaled

Admiral Says Soviets May Have Had Edge Had War Broken Out

By George C. Wilson
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Soviet Union might have had the edge over the United States if war had broken out while the Walker spy ring was operating because former Navy communications specialist Jerry Alfred Whitworth had supplied the key for determining American vulnerabilities, according to the director of naval intelligence.

In a 12-page affidavit submitted to a U.S. District Court in San Francisco before Whitworth was sentenced Thursday to 365 years for espionage, the director, Rear Adm. William O. Studeman, said the former Navy senior chief petty officer also compromised emergency communication circuits among national leaders, including the president, and military units.

He said Whitworth also supplied the Soviets with top secret information about every move of the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise for a full year, gave away the details of a three-carrier exercise off a Soviet coast, and compromised communications plans "for all U.S. naval forces in the Indian Ocean" and the nations bordering it.

"We will likely never know the true extent to which our capabilities have been impaired by the traitorous and infamous acts of Jerry Whitworth," Studeman said, raising the possibility that the identities of intelligence agents and Vietnam war operations may have been compromised.

Offering the most definitive official description of the damage inflicted by Whitworth and the rest of the spy ring headed by John Anthony Walker Jr., Studeman said that the disclosures had caused "unprecedented damage to the Navy and the nation" by enabling the Soviets to read the most sensitive U.S. military communications for years.

"Had conflict erupted between the two superpowers," Studeman said, the Soviets would have been exploiting secret information "with the potential to have powerful war-winning implications for the Soviet side."

The intelligence director said the biggest single disclosure by the Walker spy ring was providing the Soviets with the ability to "gauge the true capabilities and vulnerabilities of the U.S. Navy" so they could structure their forces to maximize their advantages and minimize their disadvantages.

"We have seen clear signals of dramatic gains in all naval warfare areas which must now be interpreted in light of the Walker-Whitworth espionage conspiracy conducted over approximately two decades," Studeman said.

The affidavit said that Whitworth, during his 18 years as a Navy radioman, was "a member of the elite fraternity" that coded and decoded so many sensitive messages that there is no way to determine how many the Soviets read after receiving the key to breaking them.

From 1976 to 1985, Whitworth met Walker two to four times a year and each time gave him 25 to 50 rolls of Minox film. Most of the pictures are believed to have been of the crucial keying materials needed to break the coded messages of the military, Studeman said. Whitworth at first received $2,000 a month for this spying but the Soviets later raised it to $6,000, apparently because the information was so valuable, Studeman said.

Other Navy officials have said that one of the biggest losses was the deployment patterns and tactics of U.S. submarines, which rely on stealth for survival and effectiveness. Although Studeman did not go into detail on this possibility, his broad concerns covered submarine as well as surface operations.

"The U.S. Navy and the nation have been seriously wounded by Jerry Whitworth's breach of faith and honor," said Studeman. "His misuse of a position of trust in naval communications has jeopardized the backbone of this country's defense. Recovery from Walker-Whitworth espionage will take years and millions of dollars."

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